


[HOME](#)
[History](#)
[NewsoftheIrish](#)
[Book Reviews
& Book Forum](#)
[Search / Archive](#)
[Back to 10/96](#)
[Papers](#)
[Reference](#)
[About](#)
[Contact](#)

Collusion evidence missing or destroyed

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

Special Branch officers who allowed a UVF killer to escape justice for more than a decade will not be prosecuted because vital evidence has either gone missing or been destroyed.

Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan this morning publishes her report into the activities of Special Branch agent Mark Haddock (37).

It is expected to confirm that Special Branch protected the UVF leader from prosecution for more than a decade despite his involvement in up to 18 murders.

Among the killings Haddock is alleged to have committed are those of Catholic taxi driver Sharon McKenna in January 1993, Catholic grandfather Sean McParland in June 1994 and Presbyterian minister David Templeton in March 1997.

Despite Haddock admitting his involvement in the murders to police, Special Branch protected him from prosecution.

However, Mrs O'Loan met victims' families at a south Belfast hotel last night (Sunday) to tell them that there was not enough proof to prosecute any police officers because of "gaps in the chain of evidence".

She is understood to have told the families that she has been unable to secure enough proof to secure the prosecution of officers because evidence has either been destroyed or has gone missing from police files.

Despite the setback Mrs O'Loan is understood to have told victims' families that she would "leave the door open" for prosecutions if new evidence emerges.

The families are understood to have been told that her investigation into the activities of Haddock and RUC Special Branch could continue and even be expanded if individual families make separate complaints regarding their loved ones' deaths.

The original investigation into Haddock's activities was sparked after a complaint to the ombudsman from the family of Raymond McCord jnr who was beaten to death by the

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UVF in November 1997.

Mrs O'Loan is understood to have told victims' families that the terms of her four-year investigation prevented her from fully investigating their loved ones' murders.

It is understood that the report will recommend the reopening of up to 18 murder investigations.

Mrs O'Loan's investigation is understood to have uncovered "significant evidence that Special Branch allowed its agents to kill without fear of prosecution".

It is also understood to question whether senior RUC officers were informed of Haddock's activities and if so, what actions they took.

Secretary of State Peter Hain has already warned that the report will provide "extremely uncomfortable" conclusions.

Haddock is being held on a hospital wing at Maghaberry prison, where he is serving a 10-year sentence for grievous bodily harm. He is expected to be released in 2009.

Mrs O'Loan's report is expected to make a series of recommendations calling for the implementation of a series of safeguards to ensure that police agents are properly supervised in future.

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[BACK TO TOP](#)

[About](#)

[Home](#)

[History](#)

[NewsoftheIrish](#)

[Books](#)

[Bookstore](#)

[Contact](#)